

| Bronisław Gembarzewski: Distinguished Director of the National Museum in Warsaw

Bronisław Gembarzewski created the National Museum in Warsaw and stood at its helm for twenty years (1916–36) (**fig. 1**). Unfortunately, his name is now more frequently associated with military history and the iconography of military uniforms. Publications discussing the foundation, activity, collections and exhibitions of the NMW marginalize his role, sometimes even discrediting his evident achievements and success.¹ This year marks the 160th anniversary of the creation of our institution – one of Poland’s largest museums – offering a splendid occasion to recall its long-standing director, creator and eminent museologist.

When discussing Bronisław Gembarzewski’s activity as the NMW’s director, one ought to take note of the circumstances in which he became the head of the Warsaw institution – on the eve of the rebirth of a free and independent Poland. A country that had been absent from the map of Europe for 123 years was being recreated on lands ravaged by the First World War. Poles were faced with a momentous opportunity to restore their own country – the homeland longed for by generation after generation. The fledgling Polish Republic had no set borders, government or constitution, and its economic situation was extremely difficult and unstable. It took an enormous effort from all citizens to create, rebuild, organize and plan the economic development of this new, internally diverse country. An agricultural and currency reform was necessary. Education, culture and the arts required several transformations and changes. The newly introduced general school obligation greatly contributed to limiting illiteracy. The Polish schools and academic centres being created were developing their educational programmes and delineating their scholarly and educational work. Private collections and museums established on Polish lands by owners with a high social status played a crucial role in integrating and fostering a national identity. These institutions were mostly founded to salvage national memorabilia and monuments, saving key events and eminent figures from Polish history from oblivion. Academic collections were also being accumulated at schools and universities. In the lands annexed by Russia, the Zachęta Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts (TZSP) was founded in 1860 on a social initiative to support and popularize

¹ See, e.g., Stanisław Lorentz, “Dzieje Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie,” *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie* (1962), Ann. 6, pp. 27–34; id., “Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie jako placówka naukowa,” in *Przeszłość przyszłości... Księga pamiątkowa ku czci Profesora Stanisława Lorentza w setną rocznicę urodzin*, Dorota Folga-Januszewska, Ewa Micke-Broniarek, Andrzej Rottermund, eds. (Warsaw, 1999), pp. 31–51; Agnieszka Morawińska, “O Muzeum,” in *Rok Jubileuszowy 150-lecia Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie pod Honorowym Patronatem Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Bronisława Komorowskiego / The 150th Anniversary of the National Museum in Warsaw Celebrated under the Honorary Patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland Bronisław Komorowski*, Szymon Włoch, trans. (Warsaw, 2012), pp. 18–19; Jacek Dehnel, *Proteusz, czyli o przemianach. Spacerownik po historii Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, with iconographic material selected and described by Anna Maślowska (Warsaw, 2015), p. 95.

Polish art. The Museum of Fine Arts established in Warsaw in 1862 acquired various Polish and European works. It was not possible to create national museums in the partitions. Regulating and establishing cultural policy priorities required particular effort and diplomacy. Bronisław Gembarzewski² was aware of just how crucial material evidence of the nation's past was in this new reality – and what tremendous role museums had to play.

Born on 30 May 1872 in Saint Petersburg, between 1892 and 1896, Gembarzewski studied painting at the local Academy of Fine Arts before moving to the Conservatoire national des arts et métiers in Paris. He was passionate about the history of the Polish army and its uniforms and authored several thousand drawings of Polish uniforms from various historical periods. At the outset of his professional career, he arranged the collections of the National Polish Museum in Rapperswil and the Kasiński Entail Library. In 1913, he became the chair – and later stayed on as an honorary member – of the Society for the Protection of Monuments of the Past in Warsaw (**fig. 2**); he also took part in activities of the Imperial Russian Military Historical Society in Saint Petersburg. He worked in the Dictionary Committee of the Provisional Council of State. He devised and headed the Iconographic Archive, established on 14 March 1914 by decree of the Józef Mianowski Fund Committee, which collected photographs, drawings and illustrations related to Polish artistic life. In 1916, Gembarzewski became a regular member of the Warsaw Scientific Society. On 1 March of the same year, he was appointed director of the municipal Museum of Fine Arts, later transformed into the National Museum. Gembarzewski decided to incorporate the Iconographic Archive into the rearranged institution.³ On 20 February 1920, he was additionally appointed director of the Army Museum. A year later, he was promoted to colonel (he was retired in 1927). He resigned from heading the NMW in 1936 but continued his work as director of the Army Museum. After the Second World War broke out, he was arrested by the Germans and briefly imprisoned in the infamous Pawiak building. He died on 11 December 1941 in Warsaw and was buried in the Powązki cemetery.

Gembarzewski's work centred on Polish artistic and cultural life, collections and museums. As one of the first directors, he took up the burden of creating the model of a leading cultural institution – the National Museum in Warsaw – whose main purpose was to acquire Polish artworks and historical mementoes. Without an adequate building, with a relatively small collection and insufficient funds, yet with great energy, enthusiasm and initiative, he started organizing, arranging and conserving the steadily growing museum collection, making it available to the public and gradually providing it with scholarly descriptions.

The First World War caused several changes in the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw (established by decree of tsarist authorities on 18 May 1862). In 1915, after the resignation of honorary director Pius Weloński⁴ and the Russian retreat from Warsaw, when the city was

² Archive of the National Museum in Warsaw (henceforth: NMW Archive), ref. no. 605c, Akta osobowe lit. G [Personal files, letter G]. See also Tomasz Siewierski, "Artysta, Historyk. Muzeolog. Życie i działalność Bronisława Gembarzewskiego," *Bezpieczeństwo. Obronność. Socjologia*, no. 1–2 (9–10) (2018), pp. 83–112; Zofia Stefańska, "Wspomnienia pośmiertne. Bronisław Gembarzewski (1872–1941)," *Rocznik Towarzystwa Naukowego Warszawskiego*, vols. 31–38 (1938–45), pp. 184–87.

³ Katarzyna Mączewska, "Bronisław Gembarzewski's Iconographic Archive and Its Draughtsmen in the Years 1914–23," *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie. Nowa Seria / Journal of the National Museum in Warsaw. New Series*, no. 7(43) (2018), pp. 11–58.

⁴ Pius Weloński (1849–1931) was a sculptor, painter, professor and director of Warsaw's Drawing School (1904–15), and honorary director of the Museum of Fine Arts (1906–15).

still under German occupation, the institution was taken over by the Museum Committee appointed on 21 September by the Warsaw Administration.⁵ The main purpose of its activity was to reorganize the Museum after more than fifty years of existence. Committee members included Bronisław Gembarzewski, Karol Jankowski,⁶ Jan Kauzik,⁷ Jan Lewiński,⁸ and Eligiusz Niewiadomski.⁹ Upon the Committee's request, on 1 March 1916, the Warsaw Administration hired Bronisław Gembarzewski as director (**fig. 3**). At the same time, the Museum – which had hitherto stored and presented its collection in the rented Nepros house at 11 Wierzbowa Street in Warsaw – received new temporary premises from the municipal authorities in the building at 15 Podwale Street. Once the previously drafted regulations were approved, by resolution of the Administration of Warsaw of 21 September 1916, the Museum of Fine Arts was transformed into the National Museum of the Capital City of Warsaw, whence began a period of the institution's dynamic development. The director managed the Museum and was responsible before the Administration; the advisory body was the Museum Board,¹⁰ and the opinion-making body – the Supervisory Committee.¹¹

Bronisław Gembarzewski took an active part in all actions related to the museum's reorganization. He co-wrote the Interim Regulations of the Board of the National Museum¹² as well as many analyses concerning the organization of museums and draft acts related to museology in the fledgling country (**fig. 4**). Among the documents kept in the NMW Archive¹³ are manuscripts of the director's studies, where he proposed ways to arrange existing Polish collections and museums and suggested their definitions and division, as well as drafts of the Interim Museum Act (1918). Gembarzewski also authored several articles on the functioning of museums and their importance.¹⁴ He developed the principles of making collections available, arranging and conserving them.¹⁵ As director, he took an active part in work on drafting

⁵ NMW Archive, ref. no. 79, Akta Komisji Muzealnej – protokoły z posiedzeń [Files of the Museum Committee – meeting minutes].

⁶ Karol Marcin Bolesta-Jankowski (1868–1928) was an architect, professor of the Warsaw University of Technology and dean of the Faculty of Architecture (1923–25).

⁷ Jan Kauzik (1869–1930) was a painter, educator and lecturer, custodian of the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

⁸ Jan Lewiński (1876–1939) was a geologist, professor at the University of Warsaw, founder of the Warsaw Scientific Society (1907) and collector. He bequeathed his collection of ancient Greek coins and Saxon porcelain to the NMW.

⁹ Eligiusz Niewiadomski (1869–1923) was a painter, art lecturer and critic, social activist, and participant in the armed independence struggle who assassinated Poland's first post-war president Gabriel Narutowicz (1922).

¹⁰ NMW Archive, ref. no. 259, Rada Muzealna [Museum Board].

¹¹ NMW Archive, ref. no. 271, Protokoły Komitetu Nadzorczego MNW, Regulamin Komitetu Nadzorczego (1923), korespondencja [Minutes of the NMW's Supervisory Committee, Regulations of the Supervisory Committee (1923), correspondence].

¹² NMW Archive, ref. no. 235, Regulamin Tymczasowy Zarządu Muzeum Narodowego m.st. Warszawy [Interim Regulations of the Board of the National Museum in Warsaw].

¹³ NMW Archive, ref. no. 262, Organizacja muzeów – opracowania i artykuły dyrektora Bronisława Gembarzewskiego dotyczące organizacji i funkcjonowania muzeów [The organization of museums – director Bronisław Gembarzewski's studies and papers on the organization and operations of museums].

¹⁴ See, e.g., Bronisław Gembarzewski's article about the creation of the National Museum published in *Kurier Warszawski* of 30 May 1921, see NMW Archive, ref. no. 262.

¹⁵ NMW Archive, ref. no. 254, Regulaminy, instrukcje i przepisy wewnętrzne MNW [Regulations, instructions and internal rules of the NMW].

the Statute of the National Museum in Warsaw.¹⁶ The City Council endorsed the Statute on 14 April 1921, defining the Museum as an institution of national importance, established by the local government of the Warsaw municipality. The principal tasks of the Museum were listed as acquiring, in a planned way, collections of Polish – and, where possible, also “global” – culture and art, as well as historical Polish memorabilia; their proper arrangement in space, systematic classification and conservation; making them available to artists and scholars and achieving the broadest possible educational impact on the society as a whole. As the first legal document to lay down a museum’s organization, the Statute was copied by many Polish institutions.¹⁷

Director Gembarzewski was also involved in the capital’s social life. He prepared the design of a new bridge at the exit of Karowa Street in Warsaw, intended to commemorate Marshal Józef Piłsudski,¹⁸ and advised on the competition for Poland’s national emblem¹⁹ and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. He wrote about the potential to use the rooms of Warsaw’s Royal Castle (1924) and the creation of an art academy – the School of Decorative Arts and Painting (1928).²⁰ Gembarzewski also served as a historical consultant for several publications (e.g., the monumental account of Poland’s history and culture, *Polska, jej dzieje i kultura*, 1928; Henryk Sienkiewicz’s *Trilogy* and *Knights of the Cross*, 1930), theatre productions (*Mazepa*, 1924; *Salome’s Silver Dream*, 1926), operas (*Halka*, 1929) and films (*Pan Tadeusz*, 1928; *Duchess of Łowicz*, 1932).²¹

The NMW’s new seat on Podwale Street required renovation and conversion.²² Gembarzewski supervised the entire process of adapting the property for museum purposes, which involved, among others, adding a top floor above the side annexes.²³ Unfortunately, the building and its interior failed to meet the requirements. The small and dark rooms were heated with furnaces, which undoubtedly damaged the acquired artefacts. Crammed and crowded interiors made it impossible to properly showcase works of art. It was not until 18 January 1922 that the National Museum’s collection was officially opened to the public in renovated rooms.²⁴ In subsequent years, thanks to the director’s commitment, apart from the permanent

¹⁶ NMW Archive, ref. no. 249a, Statut MNW – projekt, opinie, korespondencja [Statute of the NMW – draft, opinions, correspondence].

¹⁷ NMW Archive, ref. no. 249b, Statuty, regulaminy, ustawy i instrukcje różnych związków, organizacji, towarzystw i instytucji [Statutes, regulations, acts and instructions of various associations, organizations, societies and institutions].

¹⁸ NMW Archive, ref. no. 303, Uroczystości pogrzebowe Marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego [Funeral celebrations of Marshal Józef Piłsudski].

¹⁹ NMW Archive, ref. no. 251, Różna korespondencja, m.in. dot. Muzeum Wojska [Various correspondence, e.g., concerning the Army Museum].

²⁰ NMW Archive, ref. no. 262, op. cit.

²¹ NMW Archive, ref. nos. 276, 279, 280, 291, 279b, 302b, Sprawozdania z działalności Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie [z lat 1922–1936] [Reports on the activity of the National Museum in Warsaw (from 1922–36)].

²² At the meeting on 23 December 1915, the Museum Committee acknowledged the two-storey building at 15 Podwale Street (the former Basilian monks’ palace) as appropriate for museum purposes. See also NMW Archive, ref. no. 558, Budynek ul. Podwale 15 – sprawa oddania budynku na Muzeum, nadbudowa, remont [Building at 15 Podwale Street – donating the building to the Museum, top floor extension and renovation].

²³ Anna Maślowska, “Z Krakowskiego na Podwale. Wędrówki Muzeum po Warszawie,” in *Marzenie i rzeczywistość. Gmach Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, Piotr Kibort, ed., exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw, 2016 (Warsaw, 2016), pp. 28–33.

²⁴ NMW Archive, ref. no. 263, Akt uroczystego otwarcia Muzeum Narodowego w gmachu przy ul. Podwale 15 dn. 18 I 1922 [Ceremonial opening of the National Museum in the building at 15 Podwale Street on 18 January 1922].

exhibition of Polish and foreign painting, the decorative arts and military departments, visitors could see: *The Napoleonic Exhibition* (1921), *Exhibition of Teofil Lenartowicz's Bas Relief Stanisław Bechi Shot by Firing Squad in Włocławek in 1863* (1924), *Exhibition of paintings acquired for the Museum's collection in 1924* (Jan Matejko – Stańczyk, Juliusz Kossak – Jan III at Vienna, Józef Chełmoński – Indian Summer, Marsh Marigolds, Wojciech Gerson – Return of Captives, Quentin Massys – The Tax Collector) (**fig. 5**), *Exhibition of Juliusz Słowacki's Mementoes* (1927), *Exhibition of the November Uprising* (1931), and *Exhibition of Chinese Folk Woodcuts from Witold Jabłoński's Collection* (1933). Also thanks to the director's perseverance and activity, the following exhibitions were presented to the public in the newly erected building on 3 Maja Avenue (present-day Jerozolimskie Avenue), which was partially commissioned on 14 January 1932, despite construction work still in progress: *Exhibition of Polish Prints from the NMW Collection* (1932), *Exhibition of the January Uprising* (1933), *First Exhibition of Chopin's Documents and Memorabilia* (1932), *Showcase of Józef Brandt's Painting The Battle of Vienna* (1932), *Exhibition of Photographs of Old Persian Architecture from the 7th to the 17th Centuries* (1932) – also shown in Paris, Berlin and the USSR, *The Educational Maritime Exhibition* (1935), *Exhibition of Oriental Art Objects* (1935), *Exhibition of Paintings from Dr Jan Popławski's Collection* (1936), and *Exhibition of Italian Woodcuts a chiaroscuro from the Collection of the Department of Prints of the University Library in Warsaw* (1936).²⁵ Gembarzewski authored the catalogue of the *Napoleonic Exhibition* and the exhibition organized on the centenary of the November Uprising. A glimpse at these titles suffices to refute the oft-quoted opinions, according to which “[...] over 20 years [the National Museum] merely participated in organizing three exhibitions with the Army Museum [...]”.²⁶ One should also bear in mind that the small rooms of the Podwale building were not suitable for spectacular shows, while the new museum seat took more than ten years to build. Thus, preparing even smaller shows or displays deserves to be highly commended. In these difficult years, the Museum enjoyed what may only be deemed impressive visitor turnouts. Between 1922 and 1935, the National Museum in Warsaw was visited by a total²⁷ of over 380,000 people. Museum collections were also presented and disseminated through publications. Bronisław Gembarzewski wrote *Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie. Wybór cenniejszych zabytków i dzieł sztuki*²⁸ [The National Museum in Warsaw. A selection of the more pertinent artworks and artefacts] (Kraków, 1926). An album with forty-eight selected works from the Gallery of Foreign Painting was published three years later.²⁹

During Bronisław Gembarzewski's 20-year tenure as NMW director, the Museum's collections grew significantly thanks to acquisitions, donations and bequests. To quote Stanisław Lorentz: “It is to the great credit of Director Gembarzewski that, thanks to the kind assistance

²⁵ For documents concerning the organization of exhibitions between 1932 and 1936 in the NMW Archive, see ref. nos. 479, 480, 481, 486a, 487, 488.

²⁶ Lorentz, “Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie jako placówka...,” op. cit., p. 36.

²⁷ Data on visitor turnout contained in annual reports on the NMW's activity: 42,991 visitors to the Museum in 1922, 63,391 in 1923, 25,946 in 1924, 22,524 in 1925, 25,470 in 1926, 23,784 in 1927/28, 31,742 in 1928/29, 22,446 in 1929/30, 19,071 in 1930/31, 9,718 in 1931/32, 19,277 in 1932/33, a total of 18,640 visitors in 1933/34, 22,394 in 1934/35, and 29,584 in 1935/36; for separate lists of visitor turnout from 1922 until 6 December 1938, see NMW Archive, ref. no. 269.

²⁸ This publication was issued in the *Muzea Polskie* series edited by Feliks Kopera (vol. 3) and contained 373 descriptions and reproductions of selected exhibits and artworks from the Warsaw Museum.

²⁹ See *Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie. Malarstwo obce. Wybór 48 dzieł / Musée National de Varsovie. Peinture étrangère. Choix de 48 œuvres* (illustration captions also in French) (Warsaw, 1929).

of the Warsaw Administration, over less than twenty years, he was able to multiply the collections to such an extent that – especially if we add Polish paintings from TZSP to the list – the National Museum in Warsaw gained a status equal to the National Museum in Krakow.”³⁰ Detailed reports from 1922–36 kept in the NMW Archive³¹ make it possible to trace in detail the dynamic growth of inventory numbers. The general holdings of all NMW departments increased from 48,153 items (as at 31 December 1922) to 126,136 (as at 31 December 1935), i.e., by more than 2.6 times. In line with the NMW Statute, most acquired works were either Polish or related to Poland. Apart from paintings by Jan Matejko, Józef Chełmoński, Wojciech Gerson, Maksymilian and Aleksander Gierymski, Jacek Malczewski, Juliusz and Wojciech Kossak, Jan Piotr Norblin, Artur Grottger, Józef Brandt, Stanisław Wyspiański, Marcello Bacciarelli, Marcin Zaleski and many others, available on the antiquarian market and offered for purchase, artefacts were also purchased from private collections. The Museum’s holdings were further enlarged by donations, particularly numerous at the time. Valuable works of European art were also acquired. Apart from paintings, drawings and prints, the NMW purchased historical pieces of furniture, textiles, ceramics and glass, coins and medals, miniatures and goldsmithery.³² The acquisitions were not only financed from the budget allocated by the Municipal Administration. In line with its articles of association, the Association of Friends of the National Museum – established, among others, on Gembarzewski’s initiative (1917) – raised funds to purchase artworks from member contributions, donations, bequests and income generated by lectures, the consulting and evaluation office, exhibitions and publications.³³ On the director’s initiative, a concert was organized in the Grand Theatre (orchestra conducted by Emil Młynarski), with the income earmarked for the acquisition of Chopin’s original piano to the museum’s collection.³⁴ At the time, the Museum’s coffers were also filled with proceeds from the sale of casts of Chopin’s death mask and a postcard with the piano as well as the sale of entry tickets³⁵ to the *First Exhibition of Chopin’s Documents and Memorabilia* organized in cooperation with the Warsaw Music Society (1932) (fig. 6).

³⁰ Stanisław Lorentz, “Dzieje Muzeum Narodowego...,” op. cit., p. 29. Stanisław Lorentz (1899–1991) was an art historian, museologist and professor at the University of Warsaw. He headed the NMW between 1936 and 1982, serving as its honorary director in 1990–91. He worked actively to salvage historical monuments and artworks during the Second World War and took part in post-war restitution campaigns. Lorentz authored numerous academic works and museum exhibitions and belonged to several museological organizations in Poland and abroad.

³¹ NMW Archive, see n. 14.

³² For instance, the set of royal insignia belonging to Augustus III and his wife was acquired in 1925, and now represents the only surviving set of insignia of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that was indeed used during the Polish rulers’ coronation. NMW Archive, ref. no. 407, Odpisy rachunków za zakupione muzealia [Copies of receipts for acquired museum exhibits].

³³ The Association was founded by Maria Lubomirska, Czesław Baczyński, Bronisław Gembarzewski, Jan Krywult, Jan Lewiński, and Tadeusz Rychter. Its establishment was approved by the President of the Imperial German Police on 17 November 1916. A relevant Act printed in 1917 regulated the objectives, tasks and principles of the Association’s operations. Its members included Władysław Reymont, Maria Rodziewiczówna, Edward Krasiński, Karol Raczyński, Antoni Strzałecki, Dominik Witke-Jeżewski, Gustaw Soubise-Bisier, and Feliks Łopieński. See NMW Archive, ref. nos. 242a, 242b, 243a, 243b, 244, 339.

³⁴ NMW Archive, ref. no. 437, Korespondencja w sprawie ofert składanych MNW na zakup muzealiów – oferty na lit. C. cz. II – Materiały dotyczące zakupu fortepianu Fryderyka Chopina [Correspondence concerning offers to purchase museum exhibits placed with the NMW – offerors beginning with the letter C. pt. II – Materials concerning the purchase of Fryderyk Chopin’s piano].

³⁵ NMW Archive, ref. no. 192, Kontrolka wpływów osiągniętych ze sprzedaży biletów wejścia, odlewów maski pośmiertnej Chopina oraz pocztówek fortepianu Chopina na *Pierwszej wystawie chopinowskiej* [Record

The thriving National Museum in Warsaw and its growing prestige, along with Gembarzewski's activity and involvement, attracted numerous donors, who each year offered their artworks to the institution, many of them priceless.³⁶ Among the donors were not just eminent Polish collectors of the time (e.g., Antoni Strzałecki, Dominik Witke-Jeżewski, Władysław Semerau-Siemianowski, Jan Popławski, Władysław Alojzy Strzembosz, and Franciszek Goldberg-Górski), but also artists, industrialists, intellectuals and other citizens who understood such donations as their patriotic duty. Gifts were also made through numerous bequests (e.g., made by Father Józef Mrozowski, Karolina Wereszczakowa, Seweryn Smolikowski, Jakub and Alina Glass). At the NMW director's request, information about the Museum's donors and benefactors was published in the press.³⁷ This form of promoting the Warsaw institution undoubtedly attracted subsequent donors.³⁸

The NMW collection was further enriched by deposits placed, among others, by the Society for the Protection of Monuments of the Past (TOnZP), the University of Warsaw, the Zachęta Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts (TZSP) and the Museum of Industry and Agriculture.³⁹ Founding the Committee for the Acquisition of Historical Polish Paintings (1921)⁴⁰ – also devised and initiated by the NMW director – was another original form of acquiring new exhibits. As part of the committee's activities, a contract was made with the painter Wojciech Kossak⁴¹ for the creation of monumental works depicting the glory of the Polish army (fig. 7). This concept fit in with the idea of strengthening historical awareness and cultivating patriotic traditions, which strongly marked the interwar period.

The museum artefacts accumulated between 1916 and 1936 were greatly diverse. Alongside outstanding works of art, which are the pride of the Warsaw collection to this day, there were also objects of little artistic value, usually transferred to the NMW as one of the components of a donation or bequest. The Museum Board, which took final decisions in this respect, sometimes tolerated not entirely satisfactory solutions⁴² so as not to lose the opportunity to

book of the income generated by ticket sales, Chopin's death mask casts and postcards of Chopin's piano at the *First Chopin Exhibition*].

³⁶ According to reports on the NMW's activity, for instance: 138 donors donated 1,000 objects in 1924, 162 donors gifted 2,067 objects in 1927, while at the turn of 1932 and 1933, the NMW gained 2,360 objects from 202 donors.

³⁷ NMW Archive, ref. no. 281a, Informacja dla dziennikarzy i agencji prasowych dotycząca darów przekazywanych MNW [Information for journalists and press agencies concerning donations to the NMW].

³⁸ For more information on the Warsaw Museum's donors, see Marcin Romeyko-Hurko, "Noble Rivalry Between People of Good Will. How Citizens Created the National Museum in Warsaw," *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie. Nowa Seria / Journal of the National Museum in Warsaw. New Series*, no. 8(40) (2019), pp. 61–75.

³⁹ Stanisław Lorentz, *Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie. Zarys historyczny* (Warsaw, 1938), pp. 31–37.

⁴⁰ Preserved in the NMW Archive are the Committee's Statute, proclamations, meeting minutes, agreements with Wojciech Kossak and correspondence with the artist from 1921–31. See ref. nos. 393, 394, 395, 396, Committee for the Acquisition of Historical Polish Paintings.

⁴¹ Wojciech Kossak (1856–1942) was a painter specializing in historical genre scenes, portraits, depictions of horses and battle scenes. He co-authored the *Panorama of the Battle of Racławice* with Jan Styka. The Committee commissioned him to paint the following works: *General Sowiński on the Ramparts of Wola* (1922), *The Battle of Kirchholm* (1925), and *Grunwald* (1931).

⁴² Report on the NMW's activity for 1934–35: "In post-1915 Warsaw, there existed but one organized museum institution of the kind that was and still, to a certain extent, is represented by the National Museum, which persuaded owners to donate their collections [...]. Were we, hypothetically, to refuse donations and limit ourselves to acquiring collections from just some of the departments in line with a theoretically drafted programme, we would have run the risk of collections or individual objects – often of enormous value – being completely lost

acquire more precious objects. Decisions concerning finances were made by the Municipal Administration within the allocated budget.⁴³

When writing about Bronisław Gembarzewski, one ought to mention a rather singular and unprecedented form of support for the institution he headed. From January 1921, he regularly donated part of his salary to the Museum (also the Army Museum) – until May 1925, this was the equivalent of one-third, and then, until June 1927, of one-quarter of his salary. In 1923, he made a one-off donation to the NMW of his fee received from the editorial board of *Słownik artystów polskich* [Dictionary of Polish artists]. He also donated eleven photographs of old Warsaw, two silver award medals of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in Saint Petersburg from 1892 and 1893, a seal, a medal (commemorating the erection of Staszic's Palace) and a bronze plaque (Madeyski's *Stephen Báthory*), two peignoir jackets from ca. 1870, a hussar pelisse jacket, Polish hussars' armour, two books, and a family document from 1863 bearing the name of Kazimierz Gembarzewski.⁴⁴

In line with its Statute, the NMW not only made the collections available to the public but also gradually and successively provided them with scholarly descriptions and made them available to researchers. The NMW library, mostly holding art historical volumes, represented an important and valuable "scientific aid." On the director's initiative, Polish and foreign publications were successively and methodically purchased every year;⁴⁵ and the book collection, supplemented by numerous donations and gifts, played a critical role at that time. Historians,⁴⁶ conservators, architects and artists were equally eager to consult the NMW's Iconographic Archive. Its collection of materials illustrating Polish national culture: drawings, drawn copies, photographs and press clippings were also used in publications.⁴⁷ Their value was particularly appreciated during the reconstruction of Warsaw after the devastation of the Second World War.

The successively growing collections and the lack of adequate exhibition halls, storerooms and research studios made the NMW director take active steps towards the construction of a new museum building.⁴⁸ Gembarzewski organized the competition for the NMW's new seat on 3 Maja Avenue (present-day Jerozolimskie Avenue), and then supervised, and participated

for the society by being sold abroad, dispersed or even destroyed due to lack of proper conservation," see NMW Archive, ref. no. 302b.

⁴³ NMW Archive, ref. no. 252, Uchwały Magistratu m.st. Warszawy dotyczące MNW wraz z korespondencją [Resolutions of the Warsaw Magistrate on the NMW, correspondence included].

⁴⁴ NMW Archive, ref. no. 605c, op. cit.

⁴⁵ E.g., according to reports on the NMW's activity, 216 works in 244 volumes were acquired for the library in 1927. For more information on the NMW Library, see also NMW Archive, ref. nos. 536–51.

⁴⁶ In 1922, e.g., the Iconographic Archive was used by 128 people. See NMW Archive, ref. no. 163, vol. 1, Archiwum Ikonograficzne – frekwencja, preliminarze budżetowe, sprawozdania finansowe, listy płac, korespondencja [Iconographic Archive – turnout, preliminary budgets, financial reports, payrolls, correspondence].

⁴⁷ Mączewska, op. cit., pp. 33–34.

⁴⁸ In September 1912, the Warsaw Magistrate acquired a square (of over 23,000 m²) on 3 Maja Avenue (present-day Jerozolimskie Avenue) from the Orthodox Consistory. Known as the Wahl Gardens from the lessee's name, the place was designated as the seat of Warsaw's Museum of Fine Arts. The Construction Committee appointed in March 1913 began working on the competition rules, finally endorsed on 21 May 1914. Unfortunately, the outbreak of the First World War thwarted all plans. The magistrate did not approve the Museum's request to erect a new building until December 1923 (see NMW Archive, ref. no. 252, op. cit.). The new structure was intended to be situated on a plot on 3 Maja Avenue (the then name of the eastern section of Jerozolimskie Avenue).

in, the process of choosing the winning design.⁴⁹ The Committee of the Construction of the National Museum in Warsaw first convened on 26 April 1924.⁵⁰ Gembarzewski wrote the introduction to the first competition programme (announced in May). The second competition in 1926 chose the design prepared by a professor of the Warsaw University of Technology, the architect Tadeusz Tołwiński,⁵¹ who envisaged a huge modernist building composed of seven interconnected pavilions. The ceremonial, symbolic laying of the foundation stone took place on 15 June 1927 and was attended by the mayor of Warsaw, Władysław Jabłoński (**fig. 8**).⁵² After sixty-five years of existence, the prospects of a modern seat for the National Museum finally took concrete shape. The realization of these long-formulated projects and demands is undoubtedly due in part to director Gembarzewski. The construction, meant to take three years, raised considerable emotions and debates in Polish society.⁵³ Unfortunately, owing to the global economic crisis (1929–33) and the capital's dire financial situation, only the first two pavilions were completed on schedule (with considerable difficulty at that) (**fig. 9**). Most artefacts transported to the new building from Podwale were decorative objects. The move planned by the director (artworks were transported using horse-drawn carts and pushcarts)⁵⁴ required precision and a flair for logistics. The Decorative Arts Department was officially opened in the new building on 14 January 1932;⁵⁵ the ceremony was attended by Poland's President Ignacy Mościcki. The press enthusiastically described the event,⁵⁶ while the proclamation issued to commemorate the occasion, and kept in the NMW Archive, reads: "The capital has a museum, one of the richer ones in Poland, yet one with no building where its collection may grow and fulfil its tasks"⁵⁷ (**fig. 10**). Therefore, to commemorate "[...] Poland's regained independence, as a living and lasting monument, may a Museum edifice be erected in the Capital with the combined forces of individual citizens, associations, municipalities and the government, and depict the nation's cultural heritage in a powerful voice that will speak to everyone."⁵⁸ Due to the global economic crash, the Municipal Administration of Warsaw halted the construction of NMW's remaining pavilions to save money and reduce

⁴⁹ NMW Archive, ref. no. 297a, Sprawozdanie z budowy (z historią) gmachu Muzeum przy Al. 3-go Maja... [Report on the construction (and history) of the Museum building on 3 Maja Avenue...]. See also Piotr Kibort, "Na Skarpie. Gmach Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie – historia projektowania i budowy w latach 1919–1938," in *Marzenie i rzeczywistość...*, op. cit., pp. 34–75.

⁵⁰ NMW Archive, ref. no. 560, Protokoły, wykazy spraw i wniosków rozpatrywanych na posiedzeniach ścisłego Komitetu Wykonawczego Budowy Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie [Minutes, agendas and motions discussed at meetings of the Executive Committee of the Construction of the National Museum in Warsaw].

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² NMW Archive, ref. no. 561, Akt erekcyjny MNW – tekst aktu wmurowanego w podwaliny gmachu... [NMW's erection act – text of the act laid into the building's foundations], ref. no. 562, Telegramy i pisma z życzeniami z okazji uroczystości poświęcenia kamienia węgielnego... [Telegrams and congratulatory letters on the occasion of the official consecration of the foundation stone...], ref. no. 563, Błogosławieństwo papieża z okazji budowy MNW – odpis [Papal blessing on the occasion of the NMW's construction – copy].

⁵³ Kibort, "Na Skarpie...", op. cit., p. 69.

⁵⁴ NMW Archive, ref. no. 436, Przeprowadzki Muzeum [The Museum's changing locations].

⁵⁵ NMW Archive, ref. no. 298b, Otwarcie Działu Sztuki Zdobniczej MNW w gmachu przy alei 3 Maja, 14 I 1932 [Opening of the NMW's Decorative Arts Department in the building on 3 Maja Avenue, 14 January 1932].

⁵⁶ NMW Archive, press clippings, ref. no. W-11a.

⁵⁷ Proclamation on the construction of the National Museum in Warsaw. NMW Archive, ref. no. 297a, op. cit.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

costs. It was not until August 1935 that a decision was made at the behest of the city's mayor Stefan Starzyński to complete the building, and construction work resumed.⁵⁹

Director Gembarzewski's achievements would not have come to pass without the support of competent and qualified museum staff. At the time, the NMW employed, among others, Stanisław Gebethner (eminent expert in decorative arts; at the NMW since 1931), Maria Mrozińska (creator of the printmaking department; at the NMW since 1921), Anna Szemiothowa (numismatist, since 1921), Kazimierz Stefański (numismatist, since 1925), conservators: Bohdan Marconi (since 1922) and Józef Grein (since 1921), and art historian, Dr Kazimierz Moleńdziński, who worked in the Library (since 1934). Other employees worth mentioning include Stanisław Pawłowski (1930), Bohdan Marconi's pupil who went on to become an eminent painting conservator after the war; former Warsaw antiquarian, the NMW's purchasing manager Feliks Richling (since 1930), Tadeusz Chojewski (since 1934), graduate of the University of Warsaw, who after the war served as the NMW's purchasing manager and custodian in the Numismatics Department as well as Kazimierz Kulikowski (since 1932), senior clerk fluent in five foreign languages.⁶⁰ One may conclude that within the meagre budget allocated to the Museum by the municipal authorities, the director employed adequate staff and the difficult premises and numerous dislocations had a significant impact on limiting the number of people he hired. The Archive also contains numerous documents confirming Gembarzewski's scholarly cooperation with eminent Polish experts and specialists, authorities in matters of art and conservation⁶¹ (fig. 11).

Between 1916 and 1936, Bronisław Gembarzewski created a modern museum institution in the fledgling Polish state. He actively participated in the organization of not only the NMW but Polish museology as a whole, overseeing the renovations and lengthy construction of the institution's new seat. He arranged and created permanent and temporary exhibitions and published catalogues. He cooperated with many Polish and foreign institutions and scholars and hired specialists and experts. Owing to subsequent acquisitions, donations and bequests, the museum's collection grew steadily.⁶²

The 1930s in Poland were marked by a gradual stabilization in the country's economy, steady development of the industry and agriculture, social reforms and transformations in education and culture. A new generation of Poles was growing up, one educated in a free Poland. The changing reality paved the way for a new vision of museology. Patriotic exhibitions

⁵⁹ The building of the National Museum in Warsaw was officially opened by Poland's President Ignacy Mościcki on 18 June 1938. The first exhibition presented at the NMW was a monograph of Aleksander Gierzyński.

⁶⁰ "[...] the National Museum did not have a single employee with a university degree", see Lorentz, "Przeszłość przyszłości...", op. cit., p. 36. Stanisław Lorentz ("Dzieje Muzeum...", op. cit., p. 34) writes about his newly appointed NMW custodians: Dr Juliusz Starzyński, Dr Jerzy Sienkiewicz, Dr Antoni Wiczorkiewicz, and Dr Kazimierz Moleńdziński (the latter was employed in 1934, i.e., by Gembarzewski). What follows is a list of other eminent Polish scholars and museologists, yet the author fails to mention that they were employed by Gembarzewski. Perhaps this is the source of the omnipresent false conviction about Gembarzewski not hiring professionals.

⁶¹ Such as the director's correspondence with baron Józef Weyssenhoff, a collector of numismatics and expert on the subject – see NMW Archive, ref. nos. 344, 437, 406, 409 and information about cooperation with Prof. Jan Rutkowski, a conservator, Feliks Łopieński (of the Łopieński Brothers company), an expert in craft and applied arts, and Władysław Semerau-Siemianowski, a collector of antique coins and the museum's donor – see the NMW Archive, ref. nos. 341, 343, 344 ff.; Reports on the NMW's activity from 1925, 1926, and 1927 and correspondence – Museum varia. Also kept in the NMW Archive is the director's correspondence from 1916–36, confirming cooperation with Polish and foreign institutions as well as collectors and specialists; see, e.g., ref. nos. 341, 343, 344, 345, 347, 348, 349, 351, 352, 355, 359, NMW's substantial correspondence – Museum varia.

⁶² In 1935, there were 126,136 items in the museum's inventory – see NMW Archive, ref. no. 302b.

were replaced by ones showing broadly understood art history and promoting various types of artistic creation from both Poland and the world. The Museum had to introduce major changes to its programme to open itself to contemporary art currents and new expectations of its audience. Bronisław Gembarzewski's successor to the post of NMW director, Stanisław Lorentz – a 36-year-old art historian educated at a Polish university, greatly supported by the new authorities of Warsaw, most importantly mayor Stefan Starzyński – made good use of the solid foundations laid by Gembarzewski and, from 1936 onwards, continued the work of his predecessor.

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